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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003178

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/RPM AND EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IT](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY AND NATO ENLARGEMENT: MFA NATO DESK
CONCERNED ABOUT DELAYING MEMBERSHIP PERSPECTIVE FOR
ALBANIA, MACEDONIA AND CROATIA UNTIL 2008

REF: A. STATE 167113

[B](#). ROME 3080

[C](#). ROME 3068

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C Jonathan Cohen for Reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Subsequent to the Rome visit of EUR P/DAS Volker and discussions at NATO on the US two-summit strategy to advance NATO's strategic direction (reftels), Italy's new MFA NATO Director Gianni Bardini told PolMil officers on September 15 that, in his personal opinion, NATO should not delay offering membership to Macedonia, Albania, and Croatia until 2008, if they are ready to be invited before then. He also noted that the last enlargement round was not strictly tied to a summit date, with the new members joining the Alliance several months before the Istanbul Summit. (Bio Note: Bardini's previous assignment was at the Italian Delegation to NATO.) He stressed that this was a personal view, as the GOI had not yet had time to develop a national position. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Bardini pointed out that he three members of the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), have had their applications "in the pipeline" for a long time. Using conditions-based criteria, Macedonia and Croatia, Bardini asserted, have made good progress in meeting the accession requirements. Albania, though still a bit behind, is making progress on the legislative front and, more importantly, has demonstrated considerable goodwill. The prospect of near-term NATO membership is important for political reasons, he argued, because it encourages these countries to continue making the necessary changes as quickly as possible. He worried that postponing a decision on membership for an additional two years would have a negative impact on the pace of reforms. More generally, he added, it is important to keep the perspective of joining the Euro-Atlantic community on the table for these three countries. Croatia will join the EU soon, and it is a very serious candidate for NATO if progress is made on the Gotovina issue, because conditions are very near being met on the defense side. If Gotovina is captured and turned over, there would be no rationale for postponing Croatian membership.

[1](#)3. (C) Bardini further said that it would be unfair to link NATO accession of the MAP countries to membership for Ukraine and Georgia, which are "a different basket." These countries, he said, are at very different, less prepared levels than the MAP 3 from both a military and political perspective. He added that the political situation in Ukraine is "very shaky" and NATO membership for Ukraine is a very recent idea.

[1](#)4. (C) Bardini did not appear swayed by the argument that NATO needed to focus its energy on completing transformation before taking on new members. Some issues, he said, such as the ISAF/OEF merger in Afghanistan, will be resolved in the short-term. Political decisions on other issues will take more time, he added, but NATO needs to deal with all the major issues, including enlargement, concurrently. Bardini assumed the U.S. would carry the day on summit dates and the sequence of transformation and enlargement, but urged us to think about keeping the membership perspective for the MAP countries attractive, truly conditions-based, and de-linked from shortcomings in Georgia and Ukraine.

[1](#)5. (C) Comment: While Bardini's views are, as he took pains to point out, not Italian policy, as the MFA NATO Office Director and a veteran of the Italian NATO delegation, his opinions will carry considerable weight and merit our attention. Post would welcome points we can use with him and other Italian officials to demonstrate how we will keep the 2008 date from slowing progress on reforms and from souring MAP opinion (both public and official) on NATO membership. End Comment.
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